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Information Commissioner's Office

Project Eagle Lessons Learnt

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Distribution	
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It is the responsibility solely of the ICO management to ensure that there are adequate arrangements in place in relation to risk management, governance and control.

Lessons Learnt Summary

1.1 Background

Project Eagle was set up to address a significant risk to the ICO and its current working practices. The ICO's range of services is in demand and that demand is increasing. However, the level of resources to deliver those services will not increase and there is a real possibility that the resources, through budget cuts, may be reduced. Consequently, the ICO needed to re-assess the services offered and how they are delivered in order to continue to meet its obligation as a modern and effective regulator.

Project Eagle's objectives were:

- to have in place a process to decide which issues raised by the public are taken forward
- to have a defined approach for gathering and analysing information to help co-ordinate the level of resource used to improve Information Rights practices.
- to have an efficient process in place to manage workflow so the ICO can cope with demand
- to manage expectations to all stakeholders and ensure that the ICO delivers a high standard of service whilst delivering the strategic objective.

Project Eagle had to deliver how the ICO were to make best use of resources available.

1.2 Lessons learnt workshops

In order to establish what went well and identify any improvements that could be utilised in future projects, two workshops were held on 2 December. The first session had Operations managers who participated in the project and the second workshop had attendees from the Project Board.

The sessions focused on five key areas:

- 1 Objectives
- 2 Communication
- 3 Training and preparation
- 4 Project approach
- 5 Innovation - techniques or tools that added value

In addition to the workshop a wide range of feedback was gathered from a range of project participants; this was collated and shared with the Project Board. The feedback contains a significant number of detailed points from different perspectives, which add greater depth to the feedback themes summarised in this report.

1.3 What worked well

Project Eagle was considered largely a successful project when the objectives were met which led to a reduction of ineligible complaints and the number of cases therefore handled. This is particularly due to the introduction of a more robust triage process when a complaint or issue is first reported to the ICO, which has also allowed greater streamlining of later investigative activity.

In addition, the time taken to respond to concerns reported to the ICO has also reduced. Set out below are the areas that were considered to have worked well and should be repeated in future projects:

- 1 Cross department working is considered to have worked very well.
- 2 Central service guide and team-specific user guides were established, which provided good consistency in introducing revised processes
- 3 Sector pages on ICON explaining "what", "how" and "who" were widely considered to be a positive and useful way of sharing such information.
- 4 Dedicated project pages on ICON visible to all staff
- 5 Regular updates passed onto staff via managers, keeping staff well informed of progress and achievements.
- 6 Where possible knowledge transferred in advance of go-live, for example staff shadowing colleagues in other departments or working cases end-to-end before go-live.

1.4 Improvements to be considered

The following improvements were identified in the workshops and should be considered in future projects:

Task and Coordination Group

Project Eagle established a process to triage activities which ensures appropriate cases are taken on by the ICO. However, it was identified that whilst sector specific cases worked well, there is no mechanism to assess issues that go beyond an industry sector.

Recommendation 1. TCG need to establish a process that raises issues beyond the sector groups and shared within the ICO. TCG will need to ensure appropriate ownership is in place and at a senior level.

Clear communication

Project Board established a process to cascade key messages through managers to staff, which was mostly successful. However, the effectiveness was mixed, largely because different team managers took different approaches. Future Project Boards will need to put measures in place to monitor communication to ensure the organisation is appropriately and consistently briefed.

The project established an initial target date (October 2014) which was intended to be only a date by which progress would have been assessed and next steps determined, including a go live date. However, this was misunderstood by some involved in the project to be an actual delivery or go live date, which was not intended.

In addition, the project's objectives would have benefited from more clarity. Two of the project's objectives were:

- to have an efficient process in place to manage workflow so we can cope with volume throughout the year
- to manage expectations and ensure we provide a high standard of service whilst delivering our new strategic objective

Both objectives could have included measures of performance that should be achieved, in order to determine success.

Recommendation 2. Future projects should ensure that communications are delivered both consistently and completely, especially if management are to cascade messages into their own teams.

Recommendation 3. Future projects should be clearer what each milestone stands for and set the expectation of frequent incremental changes when adopting Agile project management methods. Overall project dates (by which certain achievements will have been delivered) would also be helpful. In addition, the objectives that summarises the project should be SMART (specific, measurable, attainable, relevant and timely).

Full engagement

The adoption of an agile project approach meant that some members involved were taken out of their normal day to day working roles. The project board's consultative approach was interpreted by some staff as a lack of understanding (ie asking for input to fill a gap in knowledge) but by others as a positive measure that genuinely involved staff in a significant change within the ICO. The project board identified (naturally) that some people cope with change better than others, and that when choosing project teams this factor should be considered as part of project team selection.

Recommendation 4. As part of the project initiation phase, project members who are not familiar with Agile projects should be identified and provided with training on the project methodology; ideally this should be in person (face to face). Such an approach presents an opportunity for staff to discuss and confirm understanding with the project manager, or the project sponsor, or both.

Terminology

The Agile project methodology has been well established into IT projects and it is generally accepted that for the ICO this is working well in delivering changes. Project participants need to be briefed on the project approach and establish a common set of terms to be used by the project.

Recommendation 5. As part of project establishment, participants may need training in project approach and methodology, in order to reduce any resistance by project participants. This is particularly important when adopting Agile techniques that may not be understood by those new to project work, in order to ensure all participants know what is expected of them, and how the dynamics of the project will work.



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